

VZCZCXRO9279
PP RUEHDE RUEHDIR
DE RUEHDO #1020/01 2981442
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 251442Z OCT 07
FM AMEMBASSY DOHA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7184
INFO RUEHEG/AMEMBASSY CAIRO PRIORITY 0723
RUEHMK/AMEMBASSY MANAMA PRIORITY 2602
RUEHFT/AMCONSUL FRANKFURT PRIORITY 2192
RUEHZM/GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL COLLECTIVE
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DOHA 001020

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MANAMA FOR DS/MRDCH
DEPT FOR DS/C/DC AND L/DL SUSAN BENDA;
CA FOR CA/VO JUNE KUNSMAN AND DONI PHILLIPS;
CA/OCS KIM RICHTER; AND CA/EX DEAN HAAS AND EMELY SIMONE
FRANKFURT FOR DS/FRDCD
CAIRO FOR RIMC

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/25/2017

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SUBJECT: QATAR GIVES ORAL ASSURANCES THAT DIPLOMATIC POUCH
DELIVERIES MAY RESUME WITHOUT X-RAYING

REF: DOHA 1009

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Michael A. Ratney,
for reasons 1.4 (b, d)

¶1. (C/NF) Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Ahmed Al-Mahmoud convoked Charge October 25 to discuss delivery of U.S. diplomatic pouches (see reftel for background.) Al-Mahmoud informed Charge that following the GOQ's review of the bilateral discussions on this matter, the GOQ had taken the decision to suspend x-raying of all U.S. diplomatic pouches "due to the excellent bilateral relations" between the two countries. During the suspension, Qatar would review its screening procedures of diplomatic pouches in the context of Qatar's interpretation of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations.

¶2. (C/NF) Charge thanked Al-Mahmoud and asked if the MFA would be sending a diplomatic note confirming this new policy. Al-Mahmoud said that wouldn't be possible, but the U.S. has his word that our pouches will not be x-rayed. When pressed, Al-Mahmoud said the MFA could provide a non-paper confirming the new arrangement. Al-Mahmoud said the MFA would work out the modalities, but that essentially the Embassy would return to the system employed before the Qataris introduced the x-ray requirement in April/May 2007.

¶3. (C/NF) Noting that x-raying of diplomatic pouches concerned other countries, especially the United Kingdom and France, Charge asked Mahmoud how the Embassy should characterize the resolution of the pouch dispute if asked by our diplomatic colleagues. Mahmoud stressed the importance of keeping the new understanding on permitting pouch deliveries without x-raying inspection "between Qatar and the U.S." He said speaking of it openly would "create problems" that should be avoided, and he advised Charge to tell other countries that the resolution of the dispute was a matter between Qatar and the U.S. Al-Mahmoud observed that only diplomatic pouches from the U.S. would be exempted from the x-ray screening. He explained that x-raying of diplomatic pouches began because Qatari authorities had discovered abuses of the diplomatic pouch by some countries (other than the United States).

¶4. (C/NF) Prior to May 2007, the Embassy routinely gave blanket notification of diplomatic pouch shipments to the MFA

via diplomatic note covering an eight-week period. Al-Mahmoud advised Charge to make no mention of inspection procedures in the Embassy's diplomatic notes and reiterated that MFA would follow up with the directly with Embassy on the procedures to be followed.

15. (C/NF) Al-Mahmoud asked if the Embassy had yet posted on its web site the draft announcement Charge had previously provided to MFA. (The announcement would have informed the public that the U.S. Embassy in Doha was no longer able to issue visas due to a shortage of visa foils resulting from Qatar's unwillingness to fulfill its Vienna Convention obligations.) Charge responded that the announcement had not yet been posted and told Al-Mahmoud that as a result of the GOQ decision to suspend x-raying, the Embassy would not do so. The Embassy would request routine permission for a classified diplomatic pouch delivery in the coming days so that pouches could be received and visa services need not be curtailed. Charge closed by expressing appreciation again for the GOQ's favorable resolution of this issue.

16. (C/NF) Comment: Our impending public announcement of visa suspension - explicitly fingering Qatari policy as the reason - appears to be what caused the GOQ to back down. The test will be the contents of the promised non-paper and then the first actual pouch shipment, which we will work to arrange for the week of October 28. This is nevertheless an imperfect solution: the GOQ policy thus far remains unwritten, secret, and covers only the U.S. rather than all Vienna Convention signatories. It is preferable, however, to the situation that has prevailed for the past six months.

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